

7.9.14 H.C.
B/C/H

EXODUS 12:1-15
MATT 18:15-20

MEAL WITH A PURPOSE-PASSOVER

Last week we heard about the God who is distant, the God who comes close, and the God who sends us out.

By this point in the story of Moses and the Israelites, Moses has taken up the call and not once, but many times, harnessed his anger at the mistreatment of his people to demand that Pharaoh let them go. By now, the warnings are over and it's time for God to act.

It's time for God's Passover and a meal that has been important ever since.

One of my most memorable meals took place in the rain on a little disposable BBQ, huddled in a shallow cave on a deserted beach with a friend. It had been sunny when we set out but we ploughed on undaunted, with our steak and tomatoes. Memories are made of things like that!

Memorable meals don't have to be in posh surroundings with classy food. What are some of yours?

We eat food for all sorts of reasons. The most basic is to fuel our bodies but much more than that, we eat for celebration (it seems right to have special food at a wedding or on a birthday), for neighbourliness (we get to know one another much better when we relax with food), for gratitude, for the journey, or for the sheer delight of taste!

So how does that fit with the Passover meal eaten with everyone ready to get up and run?

THE LAMB – It was to be spotless (v.5)– imagine giving away the very best animal that you can find. That's sacrifice- not the one you don't want, the one you can spare. You choose the one you *can't spare* because it's so healthy and strong. It was always about giving God 'firstfruits' – not what was left when you'd had what *you* wanted.

How often do we give God what's left over instead of what's best? (incidentally that applies to giving money or time as well- the idea of a regular gift to God is one that is about a portion from the gross income, not what's left) You give the best because you trust God to replenish whatever you need.

The lamb was also to be shared (v.4) No one should go hungry. If you have more than you need, you offer it to others. Our society is too well known for throwing away what is surplus. Don't buy what you won't eat or share.

The lamb's blood was the sign that God would pass-over. (v.7)- death would not visit where there was protection from the sign of the blood of the lamb.

And the lamb was eaten with bitter herbs, seen later as a symbol of suffering and hurt (v.8)

THE UNLEAVENED BREAD - But the lamb was eaten with bread, too. Of course it was unleavened because there wasn't time for letting it rise but look at how fastidious they had to be over making sure that none was left (v.10) There was a kind of purifying and cleaning operation before they could go and be free.

So once again we are going to see the God who is distant – holy, not to be trifled with- a God who will allow the terrible judgment of death to come when a leader has continually refused to see Him as the one in charge.

We will see again the God who comes close – close enough to set people free when they never thought it was ever going to happen and had almost given up hoping (do you ever think about people who are in slavery today – trafficked for sex or work and held in appalling conditions, or just trapped in their own degrading lifestyle that they can't get out of? Do you sometimes think they will never get out of it? This story says God can come close and make it happen).

We will see the God who sends people out, with a command that they put their whole lives in his hands. In this part of the adventure, they do.

This is a meal that is about fuel for their bodies before a journey, food for celebration (though they may not realise it yet) that they will be out of Egypt soon, food bringing them together with their neighbours. It's not in posh

surroundings with lavish entertainments or smart dress. It's basic. They're ready to run, scared. But in time it will be the most memorable meal they've ever eaten.

So move on a few thousand years and think of Jesus at his last supper. The disciples are probably thankful but a bit blasé about Passover- until Jesus tells them that the bread is his body and the wine is his blood and from this point on when they eat, they are to think of him, remember him.

The connections are clear: the unblemished, spotless son of God is the lamb; the broken bread is his body, the wine his poured out blood. God will again pass over people who share that meal. Instead of heading on their way to the separation from the distant God which comes for those who can't live as he wants, there is a time of that God coming close (in comm-union) .

'Let them go' means we don't need to be held by faults or bad feelings, by past mistakes or imperfect characters. Instead we can be sent out, like the Israelites, to make a new beginning, a new community. Communion is marked by recognition that God gave the best he had (not what was left over); there was blood, there was bitterness. But the meal is meant for purity and freedom.

Our communion is often called 'eucharist' – we have a 'eucharistic prayer' – it means Thanksgiving. We repeat the actions of Jesus and the things done to Jesus himself: we take the bread, give thanks, break it and share it.

And we're still as prone to taking it lightly as when the apostle Paul had to tell the Corinthian church a few home truths. He told them how bad it was that some counted their fellowship and communion meals so casually that some were being over fed whilst others went hungry. He told them they needed to remember this was about Christ's death and shouldn't be done lightly.

So today this meal should still be one of the most memorable, week by week by week. It should be a celebration, not a gloomy ritual. It should be something that is about thanksgiving and it should be food for the journey, for sharing.

So here are some suggestions for our meals, home and at church:

1. if you don't already give thanks before eating, start doing so- a moment's pause to think what God has given you this day is a good

habit.

2. Invite the people living nearby for a 'neighbour night' – share the good things you have and get to know them. You might enjoy it!!
3. prepare yourself before you receive Holy Communion – get to church even just 3 minutes sooner so you can ask God to show you what needs to be forgiven, or given gratitude for
4. remember Communion is just that – a union. It's never meant to be an individual affair, however much you might like to see God in that way. Those Israelites were stuck with each other, like it or not. They needed to get used to it. Jesus died to bring unity. So why not open your eyes once you've received bread and wine, and see everyone else who is in church, and pray for them and thank God for them, however much you know or don't know about them.
5. Give thanks – it may be a sacrifice of thanks, given with difficulty, but this is a worthy celebration of a God who passes over so many things that others would not; who gives grace and who sends us out to do the same.